

Remember Me Always



Child Bereavement

A handbook to help
bereaved families care
for grieving children

Penhaligon's Friends



changing bereaved children's lives

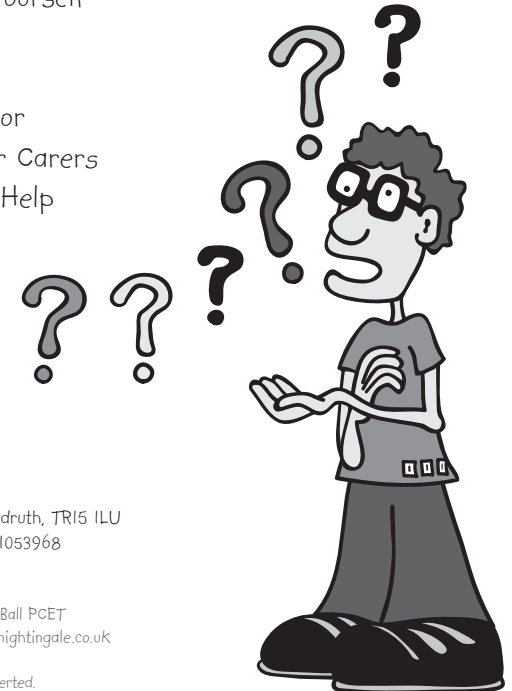
Contents



- 2 - Introduction
- 3 - First Thoughts
- 4 - Early Days - Practical Ideas
- 6 - When Someone Has Died by Suicide
- 7 - Breaking Bad News
- 8 - Children and Funerals
- 14 - Children's Reactions to Death
- 15 - The Effect on the Family
- 18 - Navigating the Journey Over Time
- 20 - Looking After Yourself

APPENDIX

- 23 - Helpful Books for Children & their Carers
- 26 - Where to Get Help
- 28 - Bibliography



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Introduction



**A child can live through anything
so long as he or she is told the truth
and is allowed to share the natural feelings
people have when they are suffering.**
(Eda La Shan)

Following the death of a loved one you may experience a bewildering array of emotions and feelings. In the midst of all that is going on you also have to deal with the ongoing practical and emotional needs of your children.

Just when you need to give the most may be when you have least to offer. You may be struggling with traumatic events surrounding the death and often some very practical pressing changes in your circumstances.

Lots of people will want to tell you what to do meaning to be helpful, but this can sometimes be confusing and sometimes hurtful.

This book is intended to help you by giving you ideas about how to include and involve your children in all that is going on. No one is pretending that it will always be easy but children will react quickly to what is going on around them.

Remember you are your children's most precious resource and you need to look after yourself for their benefit as well as your own. We hope this booklet will help you to navigate your journey and provide useful signposts along the way.

First Thoughts



For parents and carers supporting bereaved children

- * It is helpful if you can talk to your children honestly and explain what has happened in a way they can understand. They need information and reassurance.
- * Avoid euphemisms such as 'star in the sky' or 'gone to sleep' as this can be confusing for children.
- * Try to talk to your children about the funeral, including them and giving them choices will help them remember and say goodbye.



- * Talk often about the person who's died – include your children in remembering.
- * How children grieve will depend on their age and their understanding of events.
- * Your children's grief may be shown in behaviour and they may be distraught one minute and playing happily the next.
- * Inform the school about your children's loss.
- * Trust your instincts as a parent and don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.
- * It's OK for you and your children to feel sad, angry, confused, empty, guilty, anxious and many other emotions – and it's OK if you don't.

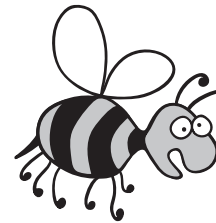
Early Days - Practical Ideas



- * Children often regress into behaviour from an earlier age. Don't worry about this as it can increase their sense of security. Allow them time to regain their confidence and energy.
- * Most children will usually respond well to physical comfort. Cuddles and hugs will help soothe distress and reassure them that you are there for them.
- * Snuggling into a fleecy blanket or an extra one on top of them can help.
- * Special foods that they like or soft foods from earlier times can be very reassuring.
- * Shock can make children (and adults) feel cold and they may need extra layers of clothing. This creates a feeling of being lovingly wrapped and of being protected.
- * A radio or tape can be played softly if getting to sleep is difficult.
- * If your child is afraid of the dark a nightlight helps.
- * Physical play can help children get their feelings out and relieve their anxiety and stress through moving about.
- * Grief can make children very tired, try to plan some quiet time into the day and arrange earlier bedtimes for the children where possible.



- * If your child is overeating try offering them a cuddle, if they aren't interested in food try offering them small nourishing meals.
- * Keep normal routines going as much as possible. This helps children feel more secure and can give them and you a much needed break.
- * You can reduce your children's anxiety about being separated from you by telling them when you are going to be away from them, and when you are coming back.



- * Helping your child make a memory box with photos, stories, poems and mementoes of the dead person is a valuable family activity and gives them permission to talk about the person who's died.



When Someone Has Died by Suicide

Remember Me Always



Bereavement by suicide is one of the most complicated and painful kinds of bereavement a family can experience. Shock, guilt, anger and sadness are strong emotions which are often accompanied by shame and stigma over this type of death. Intrusive media interest and having to deal with the police and the coroner add to the particular difficulties with this type of bereavement.

What and how to tell the children about the death is one of the most worrying things for a parent to face; it feels as if it would be easier not to explain exactly what has happened. However children may hear something from other people at school or in the community and then lose their trust in you for not being truthful. Whilst it is important to be honest with children it is also helpful to avoid unnecessary details.

- * When someone has died through suicide the process of breaking bad news is the same as for any death. It is just as important in these circumstances to be honest with the children and tell them that their special person has died - followed by **how** they died.
- * This can be done in stages and does not have to happen all in one go.
- * If children are not told that someone has died through suicide they may hear from others and not be able to discuss their feelings openly.
- * Children cope better when they know the truth even though it is often difficult to tell them.

Suicide Resources:

Winston's Wish offer one of the most comprehensive resources available to help parents and carers with supporting children after suicide. They provide a helpful booklet "Beyond the Rough Rock" which can assist adults when telling children how the person died. ISBN 0-09539123-3-7 www.winstonswish.org.uk 01242 515157

The NHS have produced a helpful downloadable resource called 'Help is at Hand' which offers practical advice and guidance when someone may have died through suicide. Visit www.nhs.uk (See also further help on page 26)

Breaking Bad News To Children

Remember Me Always



Bad news is best given as soon as possible by someone who knows the child well with support of family, friends or professionals.

1. GET READY

- * Know the facts because children will ask
- * Find a quiet place without too many interruptions
- * Choose a time when the adults are going to be around for a while - e.g. at a weekend
- * Have someone around who can support you

2. ASK QUESTIONS TO FIND OUT WHAT THE CHILDREN KNOW



3. GIVE A WARNING SHOT - "I have some sad news to tell you."

4. EXPLAIN IN STEPS



5. ANSWER CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS AT THEIR OWN PACE

6. BREAK THE BAD NEWS



7. ALLOW CHILDREN TO EXPRESS FEELINGS

8. ALLOW TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWER THEM HONESTLY

9. GIVE THE INFORMATION REPEATEDLY OVER A PERIOD OF TIME

Children & Funerals



Should children attend funerals?

Even young children can be aware that funerals happen and some may find it hard to feel completely excluded from this life event. They may go on to feel resentment should they not be included in communication or having some involvement. The death of a loved one can be a very confusing and challenging experience for a child. Attendance at the funeral can help the child understand the finality of death, and allows them to share the emotional experience with the rest of the family. No child is too young to view a body or attend a funeral, provided that they have been prepared and lovingly guided through the process of what will happen and the things they will see. Give the child the choice and include them whenever possible with activities such as:

- * Choosing the coffin
- * Placing a note, drawing, special object or memento in the coffin may be possible
- * Picking special songs, music, readings

Preparing children for viewing the body and attending the funeral

Should the children view the body?

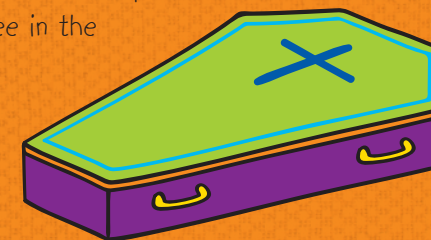
This is a frequently asked question and there are no right or wrong answers in the sense that this is an individual choice you make as parents and carers. Seeing the body of the person who's died can help children understand the reality of the death and enable them to say goodbye in a private setting. Be guided by the funeral director and offer children the opportunity where appropriate. Children should have the chance to share adult's grieving rituals but should feel comfortable with whatever choices are made.

Viewing the body:

You can ask your funeral director if they are able to provide a special viewing of the body for your children. They are often happy to explain to children what happens before and after a funeral. You may find it easier to take children to visit the mortuary, chapel of rest or church ahead of time if possible. Reassure them that they don't have to stay there the whole time if they don't want to and can go outside with an adult to play or go for a walk.

You need to help your children understand:

- * What **death** is.
- * The **funeral director** will go to the hospital or home to pick up the body.
- * That the body will be taken to the chapel of rest to be kept until it is buried or cremated and when appropriate will be made ready for them to see (bathed, dressed, hair combed, makeup applied).
- * What a **coffin** is, and what it looks like: "A special box that holds the body, made of wood, with handles and a lid. The inside looks a bit like a bed with a pillow."
- * What the children will see in the viewing room.
- * That they can touch the person or the coffin if they want to.



Children & Funerals (continued)



The Funeral

It is helpful to explain the reason for the funeral:

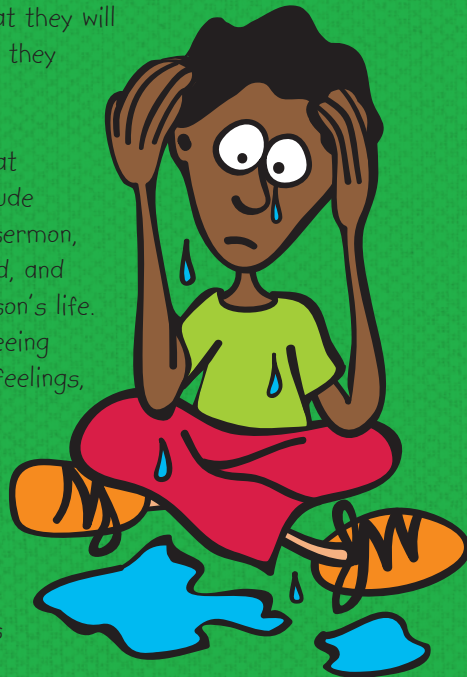
- * "We all join together with family and friends in order to remember the person who died."
- * "We want to surround them with our love and say goodbye."
- * "It is a special time to celebrate the person's life."

Children need to know **what** will happen, **when** and **where** the service will take place, **who** will be there and **why** they are doing things:

Children need to be made aware that they will not see the person that has died as they are in the coffin (box).

Tell them where the funeral service will be held: (Crematorium, church, at the grave-side) and that it may include hymns, scripture readings, a short sermon, prayers for the person who has died, and **eulogies** (speeches) about the person's life. Children need to be prepared for seeing adults expressing a wide variety of feelings, including laughter as well as tears, and reassured that any and all of these feelings are okay.

After the service, everyone will gather at the family home or some other location to share memories, laugh and cry with others who knew the special person.



If a child doesn't want to attend

It's important to give children the choice of going to the funeral or memorial service but if they don't want to go they shouldn't be forced. Make sure that they don't feel guilty for not attending, and tell them that you are happy to talk whenever they are ready.

If they don't go you could:

- * Take pictures and make them available whenever they want to see them.
- * Record the proceedings.
- * Write an account of the service: who was there, what happened, who said what.
- * Provide a different symbolic occasion appropriate for your child.
- * Include them in the wake

If you are not able to support your child at the funeral

Tell your child that you may be upset at the funeral and that someone else close to them will be there to look after them as well. Constant reassurance that all these feelings are natural will help.

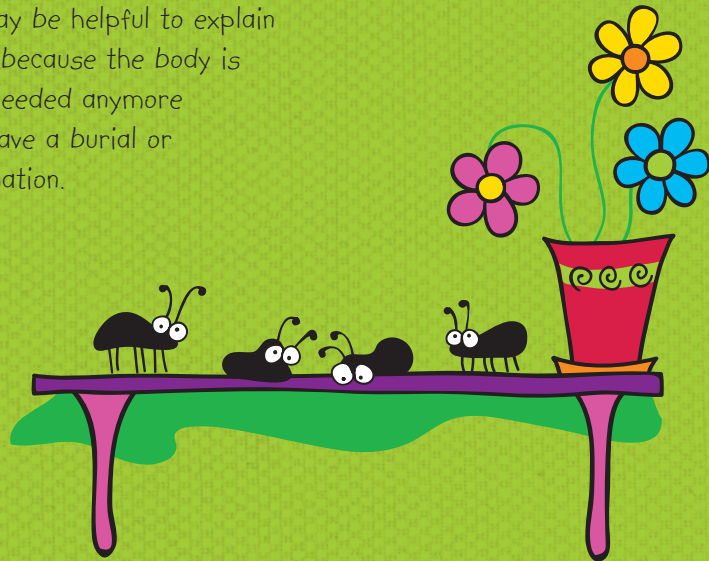
It is good to make contingency plans for the funeral service. A family member or close friend who knows the children could be asked to sit with them and care for them, as needed. Someone could sit behind or near the end of their row, so they can leave the service and go outside with them should you choose.

Children & Funerals (continued)



Whilst it can be difficult to explain what happens when someone dies, children can become more confused and frightened if they aren't given some information. It is important for children to know that death is different to sleeping. When someone dies their body stops working – it can't eat or sleep or feel anything.

It may be helpful to explain that because the body is not needed anymore we have a burial or cremation.



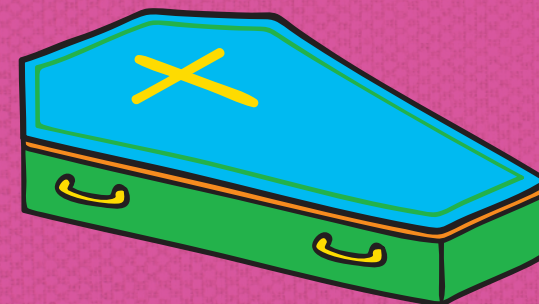
Ideas for explaining Burial or Cremation

Burial

A burial is when the body, which is in a coffin (special box) is buried underground in a hole that has already been made at a cemetery or a burial ground. This is called a grave and at a later time a grave stone may be placed there to detail who is buried there. This can be a place to visit to help us feel close to them.

Cremation

A cremation is when the body, in the coffin, is placed in a special fire within a building called a crematorium. This special fire is very, very hot and turns the body into very soft, very fine ash. What is left of a dead body is called ashes. The ashes may be put into a small container called an urn. The urn may be buried in the ground, placed in a special place or the ashes may be scattered somewhere that meant a lot to the person who died.



Children's Reaction to Death



Children react differently according to their age and understanding but the following are some of the common reactions which may occur:

- * Anger or aggressive behaviour to you or their friends or toys
- * Tantrums
- * Acting out the loss through play
- * Clingy and anxious about leaving you
- * Wetting the bed and thumb-sucking
- * Not sleeping or having bad dreams
- * Wanting to share your bed
- * Being irritable or restless
- * Difficulty concentrating
- * Problems with schoolwork
- * Regressing in their behaviour, acting like a younger child
- * Acting more like an adult
- * Crying or giggling for no obvious reason
- * Changes in eating habits
- * Repetitive behaviour including asking questions over and over again
- * Running away or not wanting to go to school
- * Mimicking the behaviour of the dead person
- * Attention seeking
- * Sad or withdrawn



This is not an exhaustive list and if you are at all concerned about any of your children's behaviour there is a useful list of contacts on page 26.

The Effect on the Family



When a family member dies, it will affect the way the family functions as a whole. All the relationships within the family may shift, adjusting to this change in the family structure. Children may mourn the person who died and the environment in the family that existed before the death.

Death of a parent

- * Often a child's first thought is that they want their parent back, but they know that they can't make this happen. They may show these feelings with explosive bursts of emotion or negative behaviour.
- * It is common for children to blame themselves for their parent's death and they need to be reassured that they are not to blame in any way.
- * If the relationship with the parent who died was difficult the child may have very mixed feelings. There may be unresolved issues and they may be left with feelings of pain and rejection, without the opportunity to somehow "make it right". Part of their grieving process will include the pain of never knowing the answers to the questions that are the most significant to them.
- * Children can often blame the remaining parent for the death. They may idealise the dead parent and become quite hostile to the surviving parent
- * Children frequently worry that their remaining parent or another person close to them may die or leave them and will be concerned about who will take care of them.

The Effect on the Family (continued)



Death of a sibling

- * Siblings may worry about their own safety and possible death.
- * Many younger siblings have an extremely difficult time when they reach the age at which their sibling died.
- * Older siblings may be plagued by guilt by not "looking out" for their younger brother or sister.
- * Some siblings may attempt to take over the identity of the deceased child in order to ease their parents' grief.
- * If the relationship was difficult they may fantasise that they caused their sibling's death, (that the good child died and the bad one survived).
- * If parents idealise the dead sibling the surviving child can feel jealous, angry, and devalued.
- * The death of a twin or triplet can have its own traumas. They may genuinely feel they have lost not only a brother or sister but also a part of themselves.



Grandparents

- * The death of a grandparent is likely to be one of the first experiences your child will have of a death in the family.
- * How your child reacts will depend on their age and the emotional closeness of the relationship.
- * If grandparents were integral to the family structure it may then be a struggle for the family unit to redefine itself. Sometimes the family won't get together as often and the children don't see their extended family as much as they did before. This can add to the child's sense of loss.



Navigating the Journey over Time



There is no set amount of time that it takes for your children or you to be able to move on with life. It takes as long as it takes but eventually you will find that the pain of grief will ease with the passing of time. The memories will still be there as you all seek to re-adjust to your lives with your loved one missing.

It is helpful to remember a few things as you all move forward on your grief journey. You can help your children by;

Keeping Boundaries

Being consistent and maintaining boundaries will help children to know their limits with behaviour and your expectations. This helps restore their sense of security which has often been badly shaken by their loss.

- * You can still acknowledge how they feel with patience and kindness yet remain firm with inappropriate behaviour.
- * Giving them time and space to express their feelings appropriately and allowing them to still be children will help.
- * Encourage them to take their share of responsibilities at home without overburdening them.

Building Self Esteem

Your child's self esteem may have been affected by their loss. You can boost this by offering them praise and compliments when it's deserved.

- * Show interest in their school work, their friends and outside activities.
- * Listen when they want to talk to you.
- * Give them as much individual attention as you can.

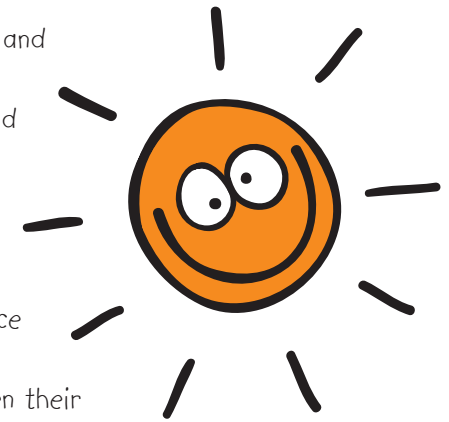


- * Hugs and cuddles are some of the most healing ways to restore your child's sense of worth.
- * Your children need to know how important they are to you.

Encouragement about the Future

Children may feel despair about life and withdraw from activities.

- * Encourage them to play and enjoy life as this can help them to start looking towards the future.
- * Explain about the changes that may have to take place because of the death in a positive way, this can lessen their anxiety.
- * They may need very clear information and schedules to begin with until they are able to move on with their lives under their own steam.
- * Give them choices where possible and include them in family decisions about the future.
- * Explain how you are all still a family even if the shape of the family has changed, and that you are working together to try and overcome the grief.
- * Give your children permission to be happy again, that it's okay to laugh, play, learn and love, it does not make them disloyal to the person that has died.



Looking After Yourself



In order to support your children well you need to find a way of supporting and caring for yourself. It is important to look after the whole of you, including your physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs.

Physically

Whilst you are grieving your eating and sleeping patterns will probably be upset. You can look after yourself by trying to eat healthily and get enough rest even if you cannot sleep.

If tension or anger affect you it can help to take more physical exercise even household tasks like gardening or re-decorating can be very therapeutic.

Bereavement can make you feel overwhelmingly tired and you may need to take longer periods of rest, especially in the early months. It is ok to ask for, and accept, help from family and friends to help you and your family in this difficult time.



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Socially and

Emotionally

While you are grieving you may not feel very sociable. Try not to cut yourself off too much from other people as your children might feel more isolated. Perhaps just see one friend or only a few people regularly. This will help you not to depend completely on your children for company.

Friends may not know how best to support you, help them by giving them some ideas about what brings you the most comfort. You may find it helps to have someone that will either just sit with you and not say much, talk about normal things, or who will go for walks.

It will help your child to know that you have other sources of support. You may find it difficult to talk to your family or friends about your grief but there are organisations which provide counselling support for bereaved people. (see Page 26)

Other Ways to Express Your Grief

You may find it helps to express your grief in creative ways i.e. writing, painting or music. Some people find that music can either soothe them or help bring the emotions right to the surface to be expressed through tears or words. Writing and painting can be a healing way of expressing grief and may help you see how far you have come.





Helpful Books for Children & their Carers



Spiritually

Grief often leads us to question why this death has happened. Most of us have feelings, concerns or needs which relate to our deepest sense of who we are, even if we don't have a formal religious belief, these beliefs can be called spiritual.

When you are mourning it may be helpful for you to explore this with support from your community.

All sorts of rituals and processes can have a comforting effect. You may have your own rituals as part of your religion or cultural tradition. If you have no particular religious association you may find comfort through devising your own rituals - perhaps regularly lighting a candle and just sitting quietly, thinking of the person who died, or spending time each week in a 'special' place - perhaps by the grave.

Connecting with nature can be another helpful thing to do. Time by the sea, in the countryside or park, or sitting in a beautiful building can really help.

'Remember that 'super parents' don't exist.
Just do what you can, when you can.
Be gentle on yourself.'
(Winston's Wish)

Beyond the Rough Rocks, Winston's Wish

ISBN: 978-0953912339

Offers practical advice for families in the immediate days and weeks when suicide has been the cause of death.

Dear Grandma Bunny, Bruna D

ISBN: 978-1-4052190-1-3

A wonderfully simple explanation for young children about death, funerals and feelings.

Help for the Hard Times, Hipp E

ISBN: 978-1568380858

Exploration of various losses that teenagers may be facing in their lives. Written in the appropriate language and well illustrated for this age-group.

Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?, Elke Barber

ISBN-13: 978-0957474505

Explaining Sudden Death to Pre-School Children in Words They Can Understand.

Josh, Jeffs S & Thomas J

ISBN: 978-1841014234

Coming to terms with the death of a Friend

Missing Mummy: A book about bereavement, Rebecca Cobb

ISBN-0230749518

This book deals with the loss of a parent from a child's point of view.

Helpful Books For Children & their Carers

(continued)



Muddles Puddles & Sunshine, Winston's Wish

ISBN: 978-1869890582

Helpful series of activities and exercises to help children remember the person who has died and express their feelings.

Rosie, Jeffs S & Thomas J

ISBN: 978-1841014227

Coming to Terms with the Death of a Sibling

Samantha Jane's Missing Smile, Kaplow J & Pincus D

ISBN: 978-1591478096

A Story about coping with the loss of a parent.

The Elephant in the Room, Amanda Edwards

ISBN—1492793243

A children's storybook with whimsical illustrations and rhyming verses of positive strategies for coping with grief and loss.

Waterbugs and Dragonflies, Stickney D

ISBN: 978-0829816242 0

This children's book explains the Christian belief of life after death through a story about the lifecycle of waterbugs and dragonflies.

We Were Gonna have a Baby We Had An Angel Instead, Schweibert P

ISBN: 978-0972424110

A book to help very young children cope with the death of a sibling before birth, at birth or shortly after birth

What Happened to Daddy's Body, Elke Barber

ISBN-13: 978-0957474512

Explaining What Happens After Death in Words Very Young Children Can Understand.

What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies?, Romain T

ISBN: 978-1-57542-055-4

In simple, honest words describes the strong, confusing feelings and suggest ways to feel better.

When Dinosaurs Die, Laurie Krasny Brown

ISBN: 978-0316119559

This factual picture book uses cartoon dinosaurs to illustrate the text and comment on what is said. An excellent resource for children when they try to grasp the concept of death.

When Someone Very Special Has Died, Heegard M

ISBN: 978-0962050206

A practical format for children to understand the concepts of death and develop coping skills from life. Children illustrate & personalise their loss through art.

You Just Don't Understand, Winston's Wish

ISBN; -10 0955953952

Advice and Support for bereaved teenagers.

Also helpful - To stop unwanted direct mail to those who have died.
www.thebereavementregister.org.uk

Where to Get Help



The organisations listed below offer specialist support and some have interactive websites that are designed especially for bereaved young people.

cBUK

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals both when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, and when a child is facing bereavement.

0800 02 888 40 www.childbereavement.org

Childhood Bereavement Network

A national network of people working with bereaved children and young people, their families and caregivers who offer online directory of services available nationally.

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Child Death Helpline

A freephone service for all those affected by the death of a child

0800 282 986 www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Childline

National helpline for children with any kind of problem or difficulty.

www.childline.co.uk

CRUSE

Bereavement care for adults.

0808 808 1677 www.cruse.org.uk

Grief Encounter

GriefTalk helpline and child bereavement support.

0808 802 0111 www.griefencounter.org.uk



Outlook South West Suicide Liaison Service

A specialist service developed to support adults over the age of 18 years who have been bereaved by suicide. 01208 871905

Papyrus

A website to help young people who may be thinking about suicide.

www.papyrus-uk.org

Parentline Plus

A very helpful parenting website with lots of useful links.

www.familylives.org.uk

Penhaligons Friends

Childhood bereavement support in Cornwall.

www.penhaligonsfriends.org.uk

RD4U

Website especially for young people, interactive, managed by CRUSE.

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

uksobs.org

The Compassionate Friends

Organisation to support parents who have lost a child of any age.

www.tcf.org.uk

The Way Foundation

Organisation to support young widows.

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Childhood bereavement support Gloucestershire and national website and helpline.

www.winstonswish.org.uk

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This bereavement guide is supported by:



Part of the Ecclesiastical Group and one of the UK's leading funeral plan providers, Ecclesiastical Planning Services works with over 800 funeral directors nationwide, providing a safe home for funeral pre-payment funds.

Funeral planning enables individuals to make their future wishes known and can help to relieve the worry for loved ones at a difficult time.

For more information visit www.funeralplans.co.uk or call 0800 633 5626.

Penhaligon's Friends



changing bereaved children's lives

Penhaligon's Friends

offers bereavement support for young people,
children & their families in Cornwall.

Tel: 01209 210624 / 215889

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